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ABSTRACT

This lesson about Islam and the Koran is intended for grade 6 or 7 core classrooms. The lesson plan uses the story of Joseph (not Joseph, the father of Jesus, but Joseph who was abandoned by his brothers in a pit) as told in the Koran. The lesson plan does not provide a translation of the story but indicates where one can be found on the Internet. It presents seven study questions for story comprehension and provides comparative text for each of the questions from the Koran and from the Old Testament's Book of Genesis. The lesson plan compares the Old Testament and the Koran versions of how the story of Joseph is told, presenting five questions for students to answer. It provides activities to examine Joseph's character traits as exhibited in the Koran; to construct Joseph's family tree; to create a dialogue between Joseph and the Pharaoh; to compare the Old Testament version and the Qur'an version of Joseph using a Venn Diagram; and to write a 9-paragraph character sketch of Joseph that provides a physical description of him, summarizes his background, outlines his personality traits, describes his motivation, and examines his conflicts. (BT)

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**Lessons from ORIAS Institute on
History Through Literature
in the 6th Grade/7th Grade Core Classrooms
1998-2000**

The Story of Joseph from the Koran

By Laurence Michalak



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Using History Through Literature

The Story of Joseph from the Koran

Notes on using the story of Joseph from the Koran
by Laurence Michalak, Vice-Chair of the Center for Middle Eastern Studies,
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ISLAM, A UNIVERSAL RELIGION WHICH BEGAN IN ARABIA

We do not and should not "teach" religion in schools, but we can and should teach a little about religions, in order to give students religious tolerance and understanding of what people of other religions believe. Learning about Islam is especially useful for Jews and Christians, because it helps them to understand the tradition of monotheism that they share with Muslims.

Islam historically originated in the Western part of Saudi Arabia. It was there that the Prophet Muhammad received a series of revelations from God, through the Angel Gabriel, beginning in the year 610 of the Christian Era. The first revelation came to the Prophet while he was meditating in a cave. The revelations to Mohammed continued until shortly before his death and are recorded in the Koran, the holy book of Islam.

Muhammad lived in the city of Mecca, where he was a successful businessman married to a wealthy widow. When he received his first revelations, he was afraid that he was going crazy. His wife helped him to accept his mission as God's messenger. People in Mecca at that time worshipped many gods, and Muhammad's message was not popular. He made only a few converts, and in the year 622 AD he and his followers fled Mecca to the city of Medina.

Eventually the Muslims peacefully conquered Mecca, and Islam spread throughout Arabia. After the death of the Prophet, Islam then spread out to the rest of the world. Today about one out of every five people in the world is a muslim. Islam is now--or will soon become--the religion with the second largest number of adherents in the United States.

Muslims believe that there is one God and that Muhammad was the final prophet in a series of prophets beginning with Adam--including Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and others. Muslims believe in the legitimacy of Biblical revelation, and that Jews and Christians are fellow believers in the same God. In fact, many of the figures in the Koran--Mary (in Arabic, Miriam), Jesus (in Arabic, Aissa)--can be found in both the Bible and the Koran.

Chapter 12 in the Koran tells of the story of Joseph (not Joseph the father of Jesus, but the Joseph whose brothers abandoned him in a pit). It has been translated into English from Arabic, and has interesting similarities and differences with the story of Joseph in

the Old Testament. Whether one believes that this is the word of God or not, it is still a great story. An English translation of the Koran can be found at <http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/etcbin/toccer-new?id=HolKora&images=images/modeng&data=/lv2/english/relig/koran&tag=public&part=12>

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COMPARATIVE EXAMPLES FROM THE TEXT

LESSON PLAN

"Yusuf "- Koran: Chapter 12 On-line text at
[http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/etcbin/toccer-](http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/etcbin/toccer-new?id=HolKora&images=images/modeng&data=/lv2/english/relig/koran&tag=public&part=12)
[new?id=HolKora&images=images/modeng&data=/lv2/english/relig/koran&tag=public&part=12](http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/etcbin/toccer-new?id=HolKora&images=images/modeng&data=/lv2/english/relig/koran&tag=public&part=12)
"Joseph" - Bible: Genesis, Chapters. 37-47 (On-line text at
<http://www.genesis.net.au/~bible/kjv/genesis/>

Study questions:

1. Why did Joseph's brothers throw him into a pit?
2. Did Joseph's brothers want to kill Joseph?
3. Why didn't Joseph's mother step in to protect him?
4. Geography: What kind of a pit did Joseph get tossed in to and how did he get out?
5. What are the accusations and counter-accusations in the story of Joseph and his master's wife, and how did they figure out who was telling the truth?
6. What kind of a person was Joseph?
7. What is the moral or morals of the story?

1. Why did Joseph's brothers throw him into a pit?

- They were jealous because they thought their father loved Joseph best.

Genesis provides some family background for Jacob's partiality. Jacob falls in love with the beautiful Rachel and agrees to work for her father for seven years to earn her hand in marriage. At the end of the seven years Rachel's father tricks Jacob into marrying Rachel's older ugly sister Leah and forces Jacob to work seven additional years to marry Rachel. Joseph faithfully works the extra seven years and finally marries Rachel. He has two sons with her -- Joseph and Benjamin. His other ten sons are by Leah and the sisters' respective handmaidens.

- The brothers are also angry at Joseph for reciting a dream which exalted him above his brothers.

Koran: dream	Genesis: dream
12.4: When Yusuf said to his father: O my father! surely I saw eleven stars and the sun and the moon -- I saw them making obeisance to me.	37.5: And Joseph dreamed a dream, and he told it his brethren: and they hated him yet the more
12.5: He said: O my son! do not relate your vision to your brothers, lest they devise a plan against you;	

Koran: envy	Genesis: envy
12.8: When they said: Certainly Yusuf and his brother are dearer to our father than we, though we are a (stronger) company; most surely our father is in manifest error:	Gen 37.4: Now Israel (<i>Jacob</i>) loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age: and he made him a coat of many colors. And when his brethren saw that their father loved him more than all his brethren, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably unto him.
12.9: Slay Yusuf or cast him (forth) into some land, so that your father's regard may be exclusively for you, and after that you may be a righteous people.	

2. Did Joseph's brothers want to kill Joseph?

- Koran: No, they just wanted to get him out of the way. They leave him where a passing caravan might find him.
- Genesis: In the Bible all but the eldest brother, Reuben, plan to kill Joseph but finally decide to sell him instead.

Koran: conspiracy	Genesis: conspiracy
12.10: A speaker from among them said: Do not slay Yusuf, and cast him down into the bottom of the pit if you must do (it), (so that) some of the travellers may pick him up.	37.26-27: And Juday said unto his brethren, What profit it if we saly our brother, and conceal his blood? Come, and let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let not our hand be upon him; for he is our brother and our flesh: and his brethren were content.

3. Why didn't Joseph's mother step in to protect him?

- The Koran doesn't tell us, but she may have been dead. Joseph's father had more than one wife; Joseph and his younger brother (Benjamin) were full brothers, and those that put him in the pit were only half-brothers to them.
- In Genesis 35:19 we told that Rachel died giving birth to Benjamin 35:19

4. Geography: What kind of a pit did Joseph get tossed in to and how did he get out?

- It was a dry well. Travelers who used the well included caravans of merchants on camels. In the Bible Joseph's brothers sell him to merchants on their way to Egypt. In the Koran Joseph is rescued from the well by merchants and later sold in Egypt.

Koran: the pit	Genesis: the pit
12.10: A speaker from among them said: Do not slay Yusuf, and cast him down into the bottom of the pit if you must do (it), (so that) some of the travellers may pick him up.	37:24 And it came to pass, when Joseph was come unto his bretheren, that they stripped Joseph out of his coat, his coat of many colors that was on him; And they took him, and cast him into a pit: and the pit was empty, there was no water in it
12.15: So when they had gone off with him and agreed that they should put him	37.25: And they (the brothers) sat down to eat bread: and they lifted up their eyes and looked,

down at the bottom of the pit,

12.19: And there came travellers and they sent their water-drawer and he let down his bucket. He said: O good news! this is a youth; and they concealed him as an article of merchandise, and Allah knew what they did.

"12.20": And they sold him for a small price, a few pieces of silver, and they showed no desire for him.

and, behold, a company of Ishmaelites came from Gilead, with their camels bearing spicery and balm and myrrh, going to carry it down to Egypt.

37.28: Then there passed by Midianites merchantmen; and they drew and lifted up Joseph out of the pit, and sold Joseph to the Ishmaelites for twenty pieces of silver: and they brought Joseph into Egypt.

5. What are the accusations and counter-accusations in the story of Joseph and his master's wife, and how did they figure out who was telling the truth?

- The Koran gives us a mini-detective story: The wife of Joseph's Egyptian master accuses Joseph of trying to rape her. Joseph says that she had tried to seduce him and he had fled from her. The case is put to a test by examining the torn shirt Joseph left behind in his flight. If the woman was telling the truth then Joseph's clothes would be torn in the front (from her resistance), but if the woman was lying and Joseph was telling the truth, then Joseph's clothes would be torn in the back (from her trying to pull him back). His clothes were torn in the back, so he is revealed as innocent. When other women berate the wife for trying to seduce her slave, she brings Joseph before them while they are cutting fruit. His beauty is so impressive that they all cut themselves in astonishment. Later Joseph is imprisoned anyway, in accordance with the Lord's plan, after he prays to be removed from the woman's household.
- Genesis has a shorter version of the story where Joseph is thrown in prison as soon as Potiphar's wife accuses him of rape.

Koran:	Genesis: Potiphar's wife
12.25: And they both hastened to the door, and she rent his shirt from behind and they met her husband at the door. She said: What is the punishment of him who intends evil to your wife except imprisonment or a painful chastisement?	39.16-18: And she laid up his garment by her, until his lord came home. And she spake unto him according to these words, saying, The Hebrew servant, which thou hast brought unto us, came in unto me to mock me: And it came to pass, as I lifted up my voice and cried, that he left his garment with me, and fled out.
12.26: He said: She sought to make me yield (to her); and a witness of her own family bore witness: If his shirt is rent from front, she speaks the truth and he is one of the	39.19-20 And it came to pass, when his master heard the words of his wife, which she spake unto him, saying, After this manner did thy

liars:

12.27: And if his shirt is rent from behind, she tells a lie and he is one of the truthful.

12.30: And women in the city said: The chiefs wife seeks her slave to yield himself (to her), surely he has affected her deeply with (his) love; most surely we see her in manifest error.

12.31: So when she heard of their sly talk she sent for them and prepared for them a repast, and gave each of them a knife, and said (to Yusuf): Come forth to them. So when they saw him, they deemed him great, and cut their hands (in amazement), and said: Remote is Allah (from imperfection); this is not a mortal; this is but a noble angel.

12.32: She said: This is he with respect to whom you blamed me, and certainly I sought his yielding himself (to me), but he abstained, and if he does not do what I bid him, he shall certainly be imprisoned, and he shall certainly be of those who are in a state of ignominy.

12.33: He said: My Lord! the prison house is dearer to me than that to which they invite me; and if Thou turn not away their device from me, I will yearn towards them and become (one) of the ignorant.

12.34: Thereupon his Lord accepted his prayer and turned away their guile from him; surely He is the Hearing, the Knowing.

12.35: Then it occurred to them after they had seen the signs that they should imprison him till a time.

servant to me; that his wrath was kindled. And Joseph's master took him, and put him into the prison, a place where the king's prisoners were bound: and he was there in the prison.

6. What do we learn from this text about slavery in the time of Joseph?

- We learn that slaves were not always badly treated. Sometimes they were treated like family members or even adopted. Slavery is bad, but it has been practiced in different ways at different times and in different places. It has been worse in some places (eg, the plantation system in the American South) than in others (eg, in Egypt at the time of Joseph).

Koran: slavery	Genesis: slavery
12.21: And the Egyptian who bought him said to his wife: Give him an honorable abode, maybe he will be useful to us, or we may adopt him as a son. And thus did We establish Yusuf in the land and that We might teach him the interpretation of sayings; and Allah is the master of His affair, but most people do not know.	Gen 39.3-6: And his master (the Egyptian) saw that the Lord was with him, and that the Lord made all that he did to prosper in his hand. And Joseph found grace in his sight, and he served him: and he made him overseer over his house, and all that he had he put inot his hand. And he left all that he had in Joseph's hand; and he knew not aught he had, save the bread which he did eat.

7. What kind of a person was Joseph?

In both the Koran and Genesis Joseph is very handsome and overcomes great adversity. He was also patient in adversity (to spend time in prison and not get discouraged), wise and inspired (to interpret dreams), and forgiving (he forgave his brothers).

Islamic commentator Syed Maududi says of Yusuf:

"But the greatest lesson this story teaches is that if the Believer possesses true Islamic character and is endowed with wisdom, he can conquer a whole country with the strength of his character alone. The marvelous example of Prophet Joseph teaches us that a man of high and pure character comes out successful even under the most adverse circumstances. When Prophet Joseph went to Egypt, he was only a lad of seventeen years, a foreigner, all alone and without any provisions; nay, he had been sold there as a slave. And the horrible condition of the slaves during that period is known to every student of history. Then he was charged with a heinous moral Crime and sent to prison for an indefinite term. But throughout this period of affliction, he evinced the highest moral qualities which raised him to the highest rank in the country." (Syed Abu-Ala' Maududi's Chapter Introductions to the Qur'an)

8. What is the moral or morals of the story?

- On one level the story is addressed to the Prophet Muhammad by God, to encourage him to persevere in the face of adversity and to have faith that God will take care of him in the end. On another level the morals of the story--faith and perseverance in the face of great adversity--are intended for all Muslims.

For a detailed commentary by Syed Maududi on the story's relevance to the Prophet's life, other lessons taught by the story, and an historical background see

<http://www.usc.edu/dept/MSA/quran/maududi/mau12.html>

(For a biography of Syed Maududi see

<http://members.muslimsites.com/r.tufail/maududi.html>)

- In both the Koran and Genesis the story illustrates
 - how God works in mysterious ways to elevate his chosen people
 - how the Israelites came to be in Egypt around 1600 BC
 - the values of faith, patience, wisdom and forgiveness.

The Story of Joseph in the Old Testament and the Koran - A Comparison Lesson Plan



Students read and respond to historically or culturally significant works of literature that reflect and enhance their studies of history and social science. They clarify the ideas and connect them to other literary works.

Students and teacher will compose a matrix or T-chart to aid in comparison after initial readings.

1. Paraphrase each of the Joseph stories and find one picture from the internet that best illustrates your paraphrase. <http://www.ee.bilkent.edu.tr/~history/Ext/Zubdat.html>
2. How do they differ?
3. What is the moral of each story? How are they similar?
4. How does each story reflect the culture and civilization of that time period?
5. How does the Koran's story of Joseph reflect the teachings of Islam

Analyzing Character Traits in Joseph Lesson Plan

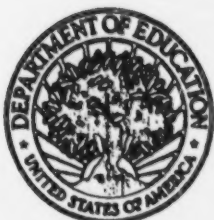


Activities

1. Read "The Story of Joseph" (the qu'ran version) and state at least 10 character traits exhibited within the text. Find a passage or quote which clearly exhibits the particular trait. Based upon what you have previously read, choose the one trait which most demonstrates one of the The Pillars of Islam and explain why.
 2. Use drawings that tell the story using the chart below
- | | | |
|---------------------|-------------------|----------------|
| Character beginning | Setting Beginning | Plot Beginning |
| Character Middle | Setting Middle | Plot Middle |
| Character End | Setting End | Plot End |
3. Look at the following three religions and give evidence how Joseph would be a good a good Jewish person, Christian, or Muslim.
 4. Make Joseph's family tree
 5. Create a dialogue between Joseph and the Pharaoh (point of view biased)
 6. Using a Venn diagram, compare the biblical version and the qu'ran version of Joseph.

7. Write a nine paragraph character sketch of Joseph using the following rubric:

- physical description
- background
- personality traits
- motivation
- conflict



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